

Unsafe Waters, Stolen Sisters, and Social Studies: Troubling Democracy and the Meta-Narrative of Universal Citizenship

By Jennifer Tupper

There is a propensity, when considering the meaning(s) of citizenship, to think in terms of universality and equality rather than difference and inequity (Arnot, 2006; Hall, 2000). In a North American context, citizenship often operates as a taken for granted status with the requisite rights and responsibilities associated with membership in a nation. In education, how citizenship is embedded in curricular discourses and how it is taken up by both teachers and students is influenced by a discourse of universality (Miller, 2000). Most often, citizenship is linked to democracy and informed by an overwhelming acceptance that democracy does indeed exist. Social studies, perhaps more than any other subject, is complicit in advancing this commonsense understanding of citizenship and democracy, and it is one that requires disruption to its very core. But where do we situate this disruption given the proclivity for standardization, accountability, and content coverage that is pervasive in social studies education? And where might we situate this disruption given the preoccupation of many educators with technique rather than interrogation?

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In this discussion I attempt to do two things. First in questioning what is democratic about our (and here I am referring to Canada and the United States) current state of “democracy,” I attempt to dispel (as I have previously—see for example Tupper, 2005; Tupper,

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2006; Tupper, 2007) the veracity of citizenship as universal (essentialist notions of universal citizenship) that seems to permeate social studies curriculum documents, glossing over or rendering non-existent, historical and contemporary realities of individuals who have not experienced citizenship in equitable and just ways. This is what I refer to as the *meta-narrative of universal citizenship* contingent upon the ‘truth’ rather than the falsity of democracy, the ‘truth’ rather than the falsity of equality. Second, I argue that if we hope to move toward a more genuinely democratic reality in North America, we need to consider the role that teacher education can play, the principles and practices that guide our teacher education programs and how we might work with our students to interrogate their very understandings of citizenship and democracy, the cornerstones of what many believe education to be serving. ‘Universal’ citizenship must always be used as a category of analysis not only in social studies classrooms, but in teacher education contexts as well, because as Cherryholmes (2006) reminds us, “teachers choose a way of life for themselves and their students when they plan and teach” (p.11).

What's Democratic about Democracy?

I have, for many years, been working in the area of social studies education, both as a teacher and now, as an academic and teacher educator. My relationship with social studies has been a tumultuous one and I often find myself living in tension between what I perceive as social studies’ ability to both empower and oppress. Often, these overlap and what might be empowering for some students and teachers, is in fact, oppressive for others. Social studies, more than any other subject, has become the sight for educating about citizenship and the ideals of democracy, and in some cases, educating for citizenship and for democratic practices (Adler, 2004; Avery, 2004). However, I believe that it is the former rather than the latter that dominates social studies education, despite (and perhaps because of) persistent calls for the education of democratic citizens. Where education and social studies fall short is in their entrenched assumptions that democracy is something that has already been achieved, that as educators we are working within a larger context of democracy (particularly in North America) that informs our practices and the curricula we are required to teach.

Yet there are those who argue that for many individuals, democracy does not and has never existed (Pateman, 1989) and those who go further in suggesting that democracy in its truest form continues to elude us, and as such should be treated as an aspiration rather than an accomplishment (Parker, 2001). I believe that for many of us, democracy does indeed exist, but for many others it remains elusive. Not surprisingly, there exists then a democratic disparity (not to be confused with democratic deficit), a larger social condition that permits some of us to live within a democratic system (more or less) and others to be marginal to it. This condition is mirrored to some extent in social studies classrooms and

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curricula, positioning the lived realities of some students within the curriculum and many others outside of it.

At its most rudimentary level, democracy may be understood as government by the populace at large (Ayto, 1990). At its most ideal level, understandings of democracy have also led to a belief that what is democratic is just and equal, so when democracy is used to describe education, it is often done so in a way that implies educational equality and justice. However, as I have already indicated, I believe 'democratic education' to be a fallacy, operating to disguise the inequities and injustices that permeate curricula, classrooms, and educational contexts. This fallacy is but a reflection of a larger fallacy in which the "realities of [democracy] have often failed to live up to [the] ideals" (Metzger, 2002, p. 30) and is becoming more and more evident in such public actions as the American invasion of Iraq and its ironic 'imposition' of democracy on a group of people through military force.

Democracy has become a rallying cry of many governments, academics, and educators, suggesting that so long as actions are carried out in the name of democracy they are justifiable and indeed necessary. In the context of education, this rallying cry has become a means of promoting government agendas where patriotism and public service are pushed (Westheimer & Kahne, 2003a; Westheimer, 2006). This form of democratic citizenship does not necessarily advance the ideals of democracy, and as Westheimer and Kahn (2006) illustrate, patriotism and volunteerism do not equal democracy. Indeed, public discourse about democratic education seems to focus on political activities such as voting and the failure of schools to ensure that young people are engaged in such processes. The decreasing number of eligible voters who cast ballots in Federal, Provincial and Municipal elections in Canada is held up by many as the failure of schools to live up to their mandates of educating 'responsible citizens.'

While it is not my intent to undermine the importance of voting as a democratic practice, there is much more to democratic citizenship and the advancement of democracy than merely voting. And surely the responsibility for such disengagement does not rest solely with schools and teachers, although I believe they do share some of the burden. Unfortunately, democracy and voting are often used synonymously, creating a simplified understanding of a complex concept. That said simplifying the challenges and practices of democracy in some respects becomes one way of divesting ourselves of individual and collective responsibilities to critically interrogate the conditions of oppression that operate in society and inform our lived realities of citizenship (Tupper, 2007).

Social and Political Contexts of Citizenship

Recognizing that genuine democracy remains elusive, I attempt to make sense of citizenship as an historical and contemporary construct, while being cognizant that our particular identities always affect our experiences of being citizens (Kohli,

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2000). British theorist T. H. Marshall (1950) first defined citizenship as full membership in a community, advancing an understanding of citizenship as a status of universal nature bestowed upon individuals in whom difference is rendered invisible by virtue of the rights and duties associated with being a citizen. Marshall's sense of the entitlements of citizenship is grounded in liberal theories that embrace a rights discourse. Citizenship, in this context, exists as a legal status through identification and protection of the rights that an individual holds within the state (Lister, 1997; Carter & Stokes, 1998). Theoretically, all individuals have universal access to these rights by virtue of their membership in a state (believed to be democratic) and it is the duty of the state to protect its citizens from injustice.

Located within a discourse of rights and duties, liberal conceptions of citizenship imply that all individuals in a democratic state are equally protected, that "rights and responsibilities are balanced to give all citizens equal status" regardless of a variety of identifiers including class, gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion. (Pearce & Hallgarten, 2000, p.5). If we accept Marshall's contention that difference is erased and that we are all equal by virtue of our membership in a nation, then we are lending credence to the meta-narrative of universal citizenship (essentialist notions of universal citizenship) and have no need for any deeper analysis or interrogation.

While I accept universalism as an important aspiration, my concern is that if it is regarded as an accomplishment, then differing experiences of citizens based on particular and multiple identifiers are negated. Feminist scholars Carole Pateman (1989), Nira Yuval-Davis (1997, 1999), Ruth Lister (1997), Madeleine Arnot (1997, 2002), and Rian Voet (1998) emphasize that liberal democratic citizenship has not lived up to its claims of universality, and is in fact infused with "false universalism." For these scholars, false universalism exists in the belief that all "citizens" of a state are equal under the law, and as such can expect equal treatment by the state, equal access to state services, and equal opportunities to participate in affairs of the state. However, the point cannot be made too strongly that historical and contemporary realities for many individuals have been quite different, hence the term "false" to preface universalism.

Accordingly, Anne Phillips (2000) argues that a central concern of citizenship is that "it divides people into those who belong and those who do not" (p. 36). Her argument arises partly from an acknowledgement of historical occurrences whereby many individuals experienced their citizenship as second-class, and from contemporary examples of citizens who experience inequity because of gender, culture, class, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity and the intersections of these, despite the existence of rights legislation.

For example, Michael Apple (2005) describes post 9/11 America as shaped by a heightened culture of fear where safety concerns are used to legitimize certain security practices. Islamic Americans, particularly those of visible Middle-Eastern descent, find themselves the subjects of scrutiny and suspicion in airports, often

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experiencing different treatment by security officials than the treatment experienced by non-Islamic Americans. In Canada, cases like that of Maher Arar serve as poignant reminders that holding a Canadian passport does not guarantee state protection from deportation or torture. Arar, a citizen of Canada, was mistakenly identified by Canadian Intelligence as a potential terrorist, deported to Syria by American authorities, and subsequently imprisoned and tortured for over a year before being returned to Canada. Mr. Arar has only now been vindicated through the findings of an official inquiry into his ordeal. How many others have had similar experiences? Arguably, the lived experience of equality, of universal rights, is often in question in alleged democratic states that claim to protect their citizens, indeed, use this claim to justify undemocratic practices and decisions. While I recognize that the theories and principals of liberal democracy are driven by desires for equality, the lived experiences of citizens clearly elucidate that such theories, practically realized, remain unrealized.

Citizenship Shapes Curriculum

Given feminist concerns that citizenship is falsely universal, and given the experiences of “second class” citizens in liberal democracies, it seems appropriate to consider the extent to which schools and school curriculum are implicated in advancing the meta-narrative of universal citizenship while simultaneously perpetuating “second class” citizenship. According to Cameron McCarthy (1993; 1998), school curriculum has long been a vehicle for (re)producing and circulating commonsense meanings (widely held beliefs, cultural truths). Students encountering school curriculum are ‘invited’ to consider knowledge in particular and deliberate ways. The knowledge contained in curriculum is there because it is perceived as having value, as being ‘true’ (Minnich, 1990). While teaching is an ongoing process of curricular negotiation, if teachers are not engaging in a critique of the curriculum they are mandated to teach, but simply making choices about how to deliver content, realize objectives, and evaluate students, the reproduction of particular knowledge traditions continues. And if teacher education programs embrace teaching as simply technique, rather than as sites for interrogation, little on the ground, in the classroom change will be enacted.

Schools, Democracy and Education

Arguably, there is a connection between schooling and the development and maintenance of a democratic society (Wile, 2000). Pedagogies that invite students to consider multiple perspectives, engage students in their own learning, and encourage thoughtful discussion are believed to advance the principles of democracy. But prudence requires that we consider the extent to which these pedagogies achieve what they set out to. I am always a little suspicious when teachers claim to use these approaches but have not engaged in a thoughtful or sustained interrogation

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of knowledge or privilege; when they are unable to discuss in-depth the conditions of oppression that operate in our society, or when they accept that teaching can be a neutral act (Tupper, 2007).

Students' understandings of the world and their place in it emerge not only from pedagogical approaches, but through mandated curriculum content, goals and objectives that drive education. Since citizenship is a central goal of education, it is important to understand how it advances a meta-narrative of universality. For example, students may learn that in "democracy" individuals enjoy the same rights and freedoms and equal protection of these rights and freedoms under the law. They may also be taught the structure and function of government, learning 'about' democracy rather than 'for' democracy, which Carol Hahn (2001) argues "is insufficient for the development of democratic understanding" (p. 16). Geneva Gay (1997) suggests that teaching for democracy requires working with students to identify and master the skills that will assist them in transforming society. While I am not dismissing Gay's argument, I wish it were that straightforward. Imagine, having identified transformative skills (whatever these might be), we work with students to master them, as if they can even be mastered in the first place. It seems to me that part of our challenge in moving closer to the realization of a more genuine democracy is to acknowledge and confront relations of dominance (Mouffe, 1996). Equally important, I believe, is an acknowledgement of and accountability for those privileges that enhance the abilities of some to more fully engage as citizens.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) describe three models of citizenship education currently at work in schools—personal responsibility, participatory, and justice-oriented. They ascertain that justice-oriented citizenship is the least prevalent model in schools (though perhaps the most important). Gay's skill mastery approach likely falls into the personal responsibility or participatory model. There is an assumption of universality inherent in Gay's understanding of democratic participation. If students can just learn and master the necessary skills, if they can use the behaviours and attitudes that are prerequisite to membership in a democratic community, then they can engage as full and equal citizens. Thus, all we need to do in schools is exactly what Gay suggests. Our students will then leave fully equipped, motivated and capable of acting upon their world in democratic ways as democratic citizens. If only it were thus!

Experiencing 'Universal' Citizenship

In my current personal and professional context, the Western Canadian province of Saskatchewan, examples of inequitable lived experiences of citizenship abound. For example, the land currently designated as Saskatchewan was entirely ceded by treaty and there are many First Nations people living and working here. Arguably, First Nations people are citizens of Canada (the scope of this article does not permit a socio-political analysis of current efforts at self-determination by various First

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Nations throughout the country). They are ‘protected’ by the same Charter of Rights and Freedoms that I am. Yet, First Nations people may expect differential treatment by law enforcement officials as evidenced in the case of Neil Stonechild. In this instance, an Aboriginal male was picked up one winter evening by police officers in Saskatoon, a city located in the central part of this province, driven outside the city, and left at the side of the highway in extremely frigid weather. He did not survive the night. Later, police officers denied any responsibility for Stonechild’s death. It was only after a witness came forward who could place Stonechild in the back of the police car the night he died, and only after much pressure from First Nations communities, that an official inquiry was launched into the death. But what if there had been no witness and no public pressure? And what if there had been no inquiry to tell us (as if we did not already know) that Stonechild was treated differently because he was Aboriginal?

Along with differential treatment by law enforcement officials, First Nations people in Canada can expect that the drinking water they are consuming on reserves is not safe (Mate, 2006). For most Canadians, access to clean and safe drinking water is taken for granted, it is a right of citizenship. In instances where non-First Nations communities (for example, Walkerton, Ontario) are subjected to unsafe water, huge public outcries ensue, and government inquiries occur. Recently, through the case of Kashechewan, Canadians learned that First Nations communities are lucky if they do not have to boil their water before drinking it on a regular basis. Yet, when a non-Aboriginal community has a boil-water advisory “it is unusual and generally short-lived” (Mate, 2006, p. 16). Unsafe drinking water and the associated health issues are a reality of daily life for many First Nations people living on reserves in Canada. These cases are but a few examples of the systemic practices of inequity and injustice Aboriginal people in Canada face, despite the existence of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982).

Similarly, the publication of the *Stolen Sisters Report* by Amnesty International (2004) finds law enforcement officials and politicians complicit in the disappearances and murders of Aboriginal women in Canada in the last three decades. The Report argues that if these women (and there are hundreds) were not Aboriginal, greater resources would be directed toward finding the women or their killers or both. Given the right of Canadians to security of person, it would seem reasonable to expect this to be the case. Individual rights are after all an important part of liberal democratic discourse.

The concerns articulated in the *Stolen Sisters Report*, and the experiences of Aboriginal women as “second class” citizens, played out in July 2005, with the disappearances of Melanie Dawn Geddes and Amber Redman in Saskatchewan. These young Aboriginal women disappeared at approximately the same time a young, non-Aboriginal woman, Lianna White, went missing a province away in the city of Edmonton. While White’s disappearance was front-page news in most Canadian newspapers for several days, (until her body was found and her husband charged

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with murder) the disappearances of Melanie and Amber were barely newsworthy. The remains of Melanie Dawn Geddes were found months later but charges have yet to be made in her murder. Amber Redman remains missing.

Social Studies as Site of Citizenship

Social studies education is regularly “framed in relation to citizenship education and particularly the preparation of individuals to participate in a democratic society” (Ross, 2000a, p. 54). The two terms, social studies education and citizenship education are often used interchangeably, yet as Alan Sears (1997) reminds us, citizenship is a contested concept. Rarely, however, is this contestation reflected in the normative liberal democratic understandings of citizenship embedded in most social studies curriculum (Stone, 1996). Rather, amongst social studies educators, there seems to be an acceptance that a central task of teaching is citizenship education and rarely, in my experience, do teachers engage in any further thought about what this might mean. But questions need to be posed, particularly if we are committed to working towards a more genuinely democratic society. What does it mean to educate ‘good’ citizens? What do multiple subjectivities and differences have to do with our experiences and understandings of citizenship? How does privilege intersect with citizenship? Whose interests are being served by the meta-narrative of universal citizenship permeating curriculum? Ultimately, what are the purposes of citizenship education?

Canadian social studies scholars Roland Case and Penny Clark (1999) identify four functions of citizenship education: citizenship education as social initiation; citizenship education as social reformation; citizenship education as personal development; and, citizenship education as academic understanding. With the exception of citizenship education as social reformation, none of these approaches require or encourage a critique of the universality of citizenship nor do they require students to engage in an interrogation of social practices, policies and structures that prevent the realization of universal citizenship. While the social reformation approach, described by Case and Clark as “empowering students with the understandings, abilities and values necessary to critique and ultimately improve society” (p. 18) offers possibilities for social improvement, research suggest that it is the approach least utilized by social studies teachers (Leming, 1992; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Teaching about the duties and obligations of citizenship with respect to political participation in a stand-alone unit on government is insufficient for the development of democratic understanding in students. So where does that leave us as social studies educators? We need to teach about the inherent inequities that permeate so called democratic societies. We need to teach about why some people participate and others do not (that it is not simply a matter of choice). We need to look at the inherent inequities permeating all levels of society and understand how they use the commonsense of democracy to sustain themselves.

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In his discussion of multicultural social studies, David Hursh (2001) challenges social studies curriculum that celebrates the contributions of “great” individuals, promoting social passivity in students “by presenting social change as the consequence of individual heroism” rather than the result of collective action (p. 129). With respect to citizenship, the implied message to students might also be that citizenship is an individual endeavour, and that any person is capable of being “great” if only they strive to be so (the meritocracy argument Diane Ravitch so often uses to justify educational practices like *No Child Left Behind*—see Ravitch, 2006). Hursh (2001) worries that students are not learning to be critical of the social systems that operate to privilege some individuals over others. This is cause for concern since learning about “great” individuals does not necessarily require students to engage in social critique, nor allow for an examination of how “greatness” is constructed and conferred.

Central to citizenship education must be an ongoing examination of social inequities and social privileges as they are manifest in curriculum content, educational practices and through students’ lives and experiences. Social studies educators need to begin with their students, assisting them to locate their lives within “social and cultural contexts of power” (Boyle-Baise, Longstreet, & Ochoa-Becker, 2000, p. 218). Thus, attention to the intersections of race, culture, class, gender, religion and sexual orientation as they inform an individual’s ability or inability to engage as a citizen must be present in social studies if students are to come away with deeper understandings of the complexities of citizenship and of their own lived experiences as citizens.

Constructing Citizenship in Western Canada

In the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, stated objectives in social studies curriculum documents express the importance of educating students to become “good” and “responsible” citizens. The current high school social studies curriculum in Alberta (2000) states “responsible citizenship is the ultimate goal of social studies” (p. 3). In Saskatchewan, secondary social studies curriculum documents express that students must “acquire knowledge, skills and values to function effectively within their local and national society which is enmeshed in an interdependent world” (1997, p 3). These understandings of citizenship are implicitly supported in social studies curriculum at each grade level in both provinces through inclusion of units on government, political systems, and democratic processes (Alberta Program of Studies, 2000; Saskatchewan Evergreen Curriculum, 1994 & 1997). It is assumed that through specific content, particularly political content, all students will leave school prepared to engage as “responsible” citizens and “function effectively” in the world. Little if any acknowledgement of the inequities of citizenship exists in either of the provincial curriculums, reinforcing the meta-narrative of citizenship as universal. However, the content of the social studies curriculums in both provinces tells a different story.

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Genuine attempts have been made in the recent curriculum development process in Alberta to include Aboriginal and Francophone perspectives in new (and as yet to be fully implemented) secondary social studies programs of study. However, these perspectives, particularly Aboriginal, are currently lacking. For example, students taking grade 10 social studies would not encounter Aboriginal Peoples until Theme III—Identity, near the end of the first topic of study “Canada in the Modern World: Challenges for Canada: The 20th Century and Today.” Aboriginal peoples are first mentioned on page 14 of the document in the context of Canada’s multicultural and bilingual nature. Teachers are encouraged to: “Briefly review why Canada is a bilingual and multicultural country by referring to our historical background in order to understand our official policies: Aboriginal peoples, two founding nations, other cultural groups, bilingual policies, multicultural policies.”

However, as Dwayne Donald (2004) articulates, the “tendency to separate the stories of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is one symptom of the legacies of colonialism and paternalism that have, both subtly and plainly, characterized Canadian society” (p. 23). Including Aboriginals as a discrete item to be learned about in a list of many topics regarding the bilingual and multicultural nature of Canada suggests that colonialism continues in curricular practices and that citizenship continues to divide people into “those who belong and those who do not” (Phillips, 2000, p. 36). Additionally, it paints all Aboriginal people with the same brush, negating the diversity amongst Aboriginal peoples in Canada. I find this especially ironic given the section’s focus on multiculturalism.

Mention of Aboriginal peoples is made again 7 pages later in *Topic B: Citizenship in Canada* in the *Related Facts and Content* column, first in a list of examples where human rights were not protected. Aboriginal peoples make their final appearance one page later, on page 22, again in the *Related Facts and Content* column as an example for students to use in explaining how Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects human rights. Nowhere in the Grade 11 or Grade 12 social studies curriculum are Aboriginal peoples mentioned. What this entrenches is the disjuncture between understandings of citizenship as universal and lived experiences of citizenship as falsely universal. The inclusion of Aboriginal peoples in the secondary Program of Studies in Alberta is a salient example of “second class” citizenship, in terms of political, economic, and social experiences, but also in terms of educational and curricular experiences. Although the goals of citizenship exist for all students, not all students will find their lives and experiences included in curriculum documents (Kohli, 2000).

In Saskatchewan, the situation is somewhat different. Because of the increasing population of school aged Aboriginal children and First Nations control of First Nations education, the provincial Ministry of Learning has paid greater attention to the inclusion of “Aboriginal Content, Perspectives, and Resources” in curriculum documents (Saskatchewan Education, 1999, p. 12). A detailed rationale articulates: “Knowledge of Aboriginal peoples promotes understanding and positive attitudes in

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all students, whether or not they are students from Aboriginal backgrounds...Social studies units of study must include accurate and appropriate Aboriginal content, resources and perspectives” (p. 12).

In an analysis of the grades 10-12 social studies curriculum, Aboriginal people are mentioned more frequently than in the Alberta Program of Studies. That said, based on careful attention to stated knowledge objectives, it seems less likely students will be required to critically examine the historical and contemporary conditions of oppression that Aboriginal peoples in all provinces encounter(ed) and are more likely to learn about basic features of First Nations culture and world views. Also problematic is the language being used in the curriculum documents to represent Aboriginal peoples and experiences. For example, in the grade 10 Unit, *Economic Decision Making*, knowledge objectives state that students will: “Know that for Indian people farming and ranching was [sic] compatible with their cultural values” (1992, p. 226).

In many respects, this statement denies the erosion of Aboriginal culture and ways of life as a result of colonial policies that required Europeans to settle (invade) the Canadian west. Suggesting that farming and ranching (traditional settler-invader activities—see Mulholland, 2006 for a more detailed discussion of settler-invader) were culturally compatible activities for Aboriginal peoples divests teachers and students of the need to examine historical and contemporary assaults on Aboriginal cultures and ways of life. What this might suggest about citizenship in terms of curricular representation is that for Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan, citizenship is dependent upon the degree to which they are able to negotiate participation in mainstream (democratic) society.

Standardizing Citizenship

The meta-narrative of universal citizenship is not only advanced through curriculum documents, but also through the imposition of standardized and in some cases, high-stakes testing, in social studies. For example, all students in Alberta are required to write a two-part provincial diploma exam at the end of grade twelve worth fifty-percent of their course mark. The exam takes place over a two-day period and is split into seventy multiple-choice questions and one essay response (two questions to choose from) worth thirty marks. The questions are developed by Alberta Education and are thought to be good measures of learning. They do not account for differences amongst students. Such practices further advance the meta-narrative of universal citizenship, erasing lived experiences of difference when all students sit down to write the same exam.

I have taught social studies in this system and can attest to the impact of the diploma exam on pedagogical choices teachers make. For example, a teaching colleague of mine shared that she believed a practice of “unloading” occurred because of the high-stakes nature of the exam. What she meant was that teachers

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tried to unload students they perceived as weaker or less capable into lower level classes to protect classroom standards and ultimately averages on diploma exams (Tupper, 2004). The discourse of standards, however, “is a superficial distraction from the real work of making schools better places for students to learn and teachers to teach” (Ross, 2000b, p. 220). In many cases, diploma exams and the ‘standards’ they represent are used as rationales for teaching as technique with heavy focuses on content ‘mastery.’ Currently, social studies students in Saskatchewan are not required to write provincial exams, but I have witnessed the recent calls for testing in this province in the name of accountability. I cannot emphasize enough how testing regimes advance a meta-narrative of universal citizenship while simultaneously ensuring that some students will always be “second-class.” Standardized tests attempt to erase differences amongst students, require no accountability for privilege, and further entrench dominant systems of knowledge. And what are the students learning about citizenship? That it is an inherently individualistic endeavour? That ‘good’ citizenship is contingent upon the degree to which they are able to succeed on standardized exams (for a more in-depth discussion of this, see Tupper, 2004)?

Citizenship Education for the ‘Critical Spirit’

Political and social philosopher Anthony Giddens (2000) argues that “education for citizenship has to be education of the critical spirit” so that students may engage critically with their own positions in society, privileged or not (p. 25). The stated goal of “responsible citizenship” in social studies curriculum, however, may not foster this critical spirit if curriculum documents and classroom teachers do not nurture such a spirit in students. Rather, based on current knowledge objectives in both the Saskatchewan and Alberta social studies curricula, it is perhaps more apt to understand “responsible citizenship” as social reproduction.

Another concern that must be raised with respect to the meta-narrative of universal citizenship is the organization of the secondary social sciences in Saskatchewan. Unlike Alberta students, Saskatchewan students are not required to take social studies at each grade level. Instead, in grades 10 through 12, they may choose to take one of Social Studies, History, or Native Studies depending upon what is offered by the school they are attending, and their own preferences. The creation of a separate course for Native Studies attempted to address the curricular inequities in both Social Studies and History with respect to Aboriginal perspectives. However, many schools do not offer Native Studies, particularly those with low Aboriginal student populations, which arguably, may be the schools most in need of such a course. Thus, offering separate courses in Native Studies rather than re-inventing curriculum to reflect the lives and experiences of Aboriginal peoples in genuine ways, perpetuates the treatment of Aboriginals in Canada as “second class” citizens (Tupper & Cappello, in press). Again, these practices, though well intentioned, send particular messages about citizenship.

Re-Imagining Citizenship

Given that normative understandings of citizenship are closely allied with formal protection from injustice, it seems ironic that schools, curriculum and curriculum practices do little to prevent students from encountering injustice. These injustices often take the form of marginalization, as exemplified through a separate Native Studies course in Saskatchewan, or invisibility, as exemplified by the exclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in Alberta. Thus, there is little that is universal about citizenship except that some students can expect to be “more equal” than others. By not acknowledging the conditions of oppression that exist in society or requiring students to engage in sustained social critique, citizenship is perpetuated as falsely universal. Just as troubling is an almost complete failure of curriculum to require students who are privileged by their social, cultural, racial, and gendered locations to be aware of and accountable for this privilege. Responsibility for change, it would seem, rests with teachers who understand the complexities of citizenship and themselves embody a critical spirit. This responsibility must extend beyond a few teachers. It requires a continual questioning of citizenship, the articulation of citizenship goals in social studies curricula and the ways in which citizenship and democracy have failed to live up to promises of equality.

Teacher Education as Interrogative Site of Possibility

Throughout this discussion, I have been highly critical of social studies, schooling, and teaching, yet I see many possibilities for education “of the critical spirit,” beginning with teacher education. Joe Kincheloe (2004) advocates teacher education as a site for the development of “critical complex teaching.” He argues that such an approach understands teaching as a body of knowledge, challenging more technical teacher education, or teaching as a set of skills. Teaching as a body of knowledge requires disputing claims of neutrality, taking account of the assumptions that inform education, and recognizing the socio-political context of curriculum and teaching (Kincheloe, 2004).

Building on this, I see teacher education as a site of interrogative possibility where meta-narratives of universal citizenship can be questioned and dismantled, and where democracy is understood to be an aspiration rather than an accomplishment. Our principles of teacher education at the University of Regina articulate teaching as process whereby our students are engaged in critical self-reflective inquiry, and commit to preparing students to understand the construction of social differences and how education may be used to improve the human condition (Faculty of Education, 2006). While there is still focus on practical strategies of teaching, these must always be informed by consideration of teaching as political act (Noguera & Cohen, 2006). These principles offer spaces (and justification) for disruption.

For example, in the curriculum class I teach to my social studies majors in their third year, I introduce them to curriculum as construction rather than as

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merely a body of knowledge to be taught to students. We explore curriculum as cultural document, curriculum as gendered document, and curriculum as racial document all the while considering how these play out in classrooms and inform the way in which citizenship is lived and experienced. For many, this examination evokes discomfort because they are being asked to question the very core of their understandings, the very essence of what they think they know.

When we are well into the course, I introduce the concept of privilege by having students read a piece by Peggy McIntosh (1988), “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” This is an eye-opener. The majority of my students are White, come from middle-class homes, and have professional parents. Since the McIntosh essay focuses on race, I also have my students work through privilege based on social-class and on gendered identity. Students have rarely, if ever, been asked to identify and be accountable for their own privileges. They have rarely, if ever, been asked to consider how privileges are reproduced through curriculum, through meta-narratives of universal citizenship. I am not going to lie and pretend that this is not difficult work, but if we are to move toward a more genuine democracy, it is necessary and it is urgent. I have had struggles and tears, encountered hostility and resistance, had scathing course evaluations. Yet to not do this work, to demonstrate silence and inaction, is to be complicit with the status quo (Noguera & Cohen, 2006).

When my students have completed their curriculum course, I work with them again the following semester in two additional courses focussing on teaching methods and assessment and evaluation. I see both of these as sites of further interrogation. In the assessment course, we spend a great deal of time exploring high-stakes, standardized testing, examining assessment for learning versus assessment of learning, and considering the relationship between assessment practices and citizenship. In the methods course, we explore how the pedagogical choices we make as teachers are implicated (or not) in sustaining the meta-narrative of universal citizenship. I encourage my students to be critical of the curriculum they are required to teach, to expect the same of their own students. I want them to allow for, even encourage, student critique (Marker, 2000). I repeatedly ask my students to consider the kind of teacher they would like to be; to consider whether they will be implicated in reproducing current inequitable systems or transforming them.

Carole Hahn (2001) reminds us that in democracies, “citizen participation is about more than voting and following current events; it also requires the engagement of citizens to improve society” (p. 19). But more than engagement is needed. I would argue that if we are genuine in our desire to improve society, then we must be cognizant that a democratic disparity exists and mindful of how this disparity informs citizen participation in society. Only then can we begin to work with our own students (in schools and in universities) to interrogate the meta-narrative of universal citizenship. Social studies classrooms and teacher education classes must encourage students to do more than just deliberate, discuss, and decision-make about public policy issues (Hahn, 2001). Rather, students and student teachers

must take account of their privileges (or lack thereof) and question how these inform their lived experiences of citizenship and democratic engagement. I have provided many examples throughout this discussion of how citizenship has failed to live up to claims of universality, of how we might work with our own students to disrupt the meta-narrative of universal citizenship. It is my hope that social studies as a site of citizenship begins to live up to its potential as an interrogative place of empowerment where students and teachers endeavour to work towards a more genuine realization of democracy for all people.

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